

# Occupying a TD Position—Sequence of Events

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## AUTHOR'S NOTE

There is a definite order to follow to ensure that the most important things are done first, in case tanks arrive before they are expected or when there's a limited amount of time available. This is not necessarily the only way, but it is one which has been proved in combat—and while it obviously cannot always be followed meticulously, it is generally sound.

### 1. *Emergency Action by Forward Observer*

The moment the Gun Commander arrives in the area of his position, he places the gun in emergency action covering the primary field of fire and posts a lookout who will watch the terrain to ensure that the crew are not caught by tanks or infantry unprepared. The gun will be loaded when boresighting has been finished and the sights will be aligned on the most likely avenue of approach.

### 2. *Inform Platoon Commander "In Emergency Action"*

The Gun Commander then informs the Platoon Commander that his gun is in emergency action. He will use radio if he has it, or send a runner either to the other gun of the section which has radio or straight to Platoon HQ. (This very important move helps the platoon commander considerably. He has a great number of things to do and the more his Gun Commanders can help him, the better for the efficiency of the Platoon and its Commander.)

### 3. *Inform Crew of Situation, Put Them in the Picture*

At the moment the Gun Commander is the only man in the crew who knows the tactical situation. If a stray round comes over and he gets knocked out, then all his information dies with him and the gun and all its crew will become nothing more than a liability for the time being. So now is the time for the Gun Commander to give his men the general situation—put them in the picture; this must be done early and doesn't take more than a minute or two. There are three things which even the most backward man in the battalion must always know, and must remember to ask until he is told:

- a. *Where* are the enemy?
- b. *Where* are we going in order to hit that enemy?
- c. *How long* have we got?

In official order-language that would read:

- a. Information concerning the enemy.
- b. Location of the gun position.
- c. Time factor.

In the simple language, however, it is more likely to be remembered in the logical sequence illustrated above.

### 4. *Prime Mover—If Any*

Either before or after putting the men in the picture, you must send the prime mover (if any) away from the area of the gun position to the motor park—but remember first to remove all the digging tools and other equipment required. On the subject of prime movers, never drive right up onto the gun position unless there is literally no hope of manhandling the gun into its pit, and even when manhandling has been done the tracks up to the pit must be obliterated if you want your crew to live; with grass one of the best methods is to get down on your

hands and knees and "ruffle up" the grass with your fingers as if you were playing hell with another guy's hair!

### 5. *"Size Up" the Gun Position Before Occupation*

All this sounds very long-winded but it is all done very quickly when the crew know what they are doing. Before anyone is allowed to approach the actual gun position after the Gun Commander has chosen it, the latter has a good look at it from the front and makes his crew do the same; thus they will carry in their minds a mental picture of what the position looked like before they started to disrupt it by digging, etc.—that is, what the completed position must look like after the gun is in and everything is ready to fight—a most important point. The Gun Commander will chip out with a spade the *actual area* to be dug; the crew should be trained not to be "hamfisted," to treat the area carefully—not to tread down grass, not to break natural foliage, not to tread on the rim of the pit, not to walk about in front of it, not to leave anything in front of the pit at any time, to avoid making tracks to and from the pit, almost to walk on tip-toe.

### 6. *Work at Gun Position*

While this digging is going on, the Gun Commander must see to the following:

- a. Prepare range card, which should be left in the care of the lookout for the time being.
- b. Organize the checking of every round of ammunition. In these days of extensive mass production, it sometimes happens that one round will stick in the breech on being either loaded or unloaded. Maybe only one round out of several hundred will stick, but when it does it matters vitally. When fighting tanks, split seconds count—and a "gummy" round may make all the difference not only between life and death to the detachment but also success or failure to the entire action. Therefore every single round must be loaded into the gun, the breech closed, and the round unloaded again. Occasionally a round will become separated, but that doesn't matter.
- c. Prepare lookout relief roster. Normally the lookout should be a man just off digging: work and rest.

### 7. *Progressive Digging: General Points*

Then the Gun Commander goes back to inspect the digging. His crew have been trained in the art—and it is quite an art—and this is the way they are trained. There is a difference between a primary and a secondary field of fire (normal and contingent sectors, if you like) and this applies not only to the area laterally but also from the point of view of range. All this means is that when the towed gun has been dug in completely, it will be capable of firing over a larger area than is its primary field of fire. It will probably be capable of covering something like 90° and up to a range of maybe 2,000 yards, but its primary field of fire will normally be about 40° to 45° and up to a range of about 1,000 or 1,200 yards. The rest is its secondary field of fire, for emergencies. The men in this particular crew have been trained to realize that the mere fact that they can see 3,000 yards does not necessarily mean that they will ever shoot at that range—and though this gun can cover 100° field of fire and is dug in for that amount,

they are not responsible for all that as a primary responsibility. They do realize, however, that they must end up by being able to cover all that, if required.

You must always dig as much as possible. If it is a very quick action you may only have time to dig in the spades (you must do this if you want to get a hit with your first round and if you want your gunner to keep both his eyes intact), so this comes first; next dig in the wheels. Then as time goes on the hasty digging can be improved and extended until the gun is completely dug in as described below.

When these men first went into combat they were given a primary field of fire of 40° and, being in an open position, were told to dig the gun in to cover something like 120° altogether.



An M-10 tank destroyer well dug in near Mignano

They forthwith dug out the whole surface at once. The time they spent digging out the whole area to half the required depth was equivalent to the time which would have been required to dig the gun in completely for its primary field of fire. Tanks arrived before they were ready for them and the result was that the gun had to fight when only half dug in.

This time they are not being caught like that: they are digging the gun in completely for its primary field of fire. The pit is the shape of a keyhole or a slice of pie; when that is completed they will then enlarge it to the required size by carving bits off at each side until they have the required dimensions (which might be up to 360° in an open position). Then at no time can they be caught unprepared to take on their primary field of fire. You might think it is a small point, but it is an all-important one.

Use of trail logs is advocated to ensure stability and ease of shifting trails. A foxhole must be dug for the Gun Commander's OP: one on each flank, or in front, to be used according to the way the wind blows the dust and muzzle smoke. If feasible, a crawl trench should connect each OP with the gun pit.

You will also see that the gun comes first, then ammunition trenches, and finally personnel pits. Of course, under certain circumstances, but not normally, the crew will probably dig *scrapes* for themselves after the gun has been dug in in a hasty manner. This is a system of progressive digging—continually improve. Dig, dig, dig, that's what the Germans say. And they

are absolutely right. The longer you are in a position the more improved it should be, and this goes for self-propelled as well as towed. As regards self-propelled guns, the digging is of course different, although the principles of progressive digging are the same in either case; first dig trenches to admit the tracks, using the spoil for a parapet and camouflaging in the same method as is described for towed guns. Then if tanks do not appear, as before dig, dig, dig. Go on as far as time and the avoidance of dead space allow, up to gun defilade. Meanwhile the SP gun remains in a cover position nearby. If you are in a position a week, it should be like living at the Waldorf-Astoria.

Remember that slit trenches must be at right angles to the line of fire, so that the tanks' machine guns won't literally enfilade them. Also remember that the crawl trench connecting it with the gun pit must be under cover. Crawl trenches should be zig-zag.

A word on parapets; normally do not have a parapet at all. Have one only when digging in will produce dead space in your field of fire. Therefore the spoil must be got rid of. Don't back up your prime mover to the gun pit—that is unpardonable! Carry the spoil away in empty sandbags or in a tarpaulin, a slow job but the only way. Of course, there may be so many tracks in the area anyway that one or two more won't seem to matter, but even then you must consider the question of observation from air and ground OPs.

#### 8. Camouflage and Defilade

This crew has also been well-trained in the art of camouflage. All this is linked up with the previous remarks on not being ham-fisted in the gun-position. Treat it as if you were in your mother's drawing-room. (This Gun Commander has threatened to break the neck of anyone who walks outside the front of the pit or who breaks any branches unnecessarily, and he is a big fellow.)

This gun has been sited in a little corner of a woods, and the men are defiladed from the tanks following the one they will be shooting in the flank when it gets into their field of fire. They are also defiladed from the high ground in the enemy's hands which will certainly be studded with artillery OPs which will see a gun which is not defiladed long before it even opens fire. This Gun Commander has been careful to ensure that his gun is drawn well back behind the defilade. Notice that there is about six feet between the muzzle of the gun and the end of the defilade, because the flash must be defiladed as well as the gun and its crew, etc. This crew once covered their gun with natural camouflage and were dismayed to find that the moment they traversed and fired the gun everything fell off, and although they had been camouflaged as far as the first tank was concerned, they were utterly naked as regards the following tanks. So now they are careful to tie all the camouflage on the shield or turret and the barrel, and they also take care that the vision of the gunner is not obscured. The back wall of the pit shows up black or white, as the case may be, from a little distance out, so branches of camouflage similar to those round the gun (but taken from a spot some distance away) are being put in to cover that wall. They have learned never to use a net unless there is no local camouflage available. They are applying this lesson to the question of cover from the air—instead of using a net to cover them above, which will make them look like Barnum's circus, they are gently bending the saplings over their heads and wiring them there so that they form a natural growing roof; take care not to bend the branches too far or they will look unnatural. There is one more thing they are doing—they are digging a trench

in front of the gun pit into which they can depress the tube at all times except when they actually begin to track a tank. This alters the silhouette and conceals the muzzle, which always shows up as a tell-tale black hole. This gun will be invisible at 100 yards, through field glasses.

If this crew had their gun in the open where a flat top was essential they would first camouflage the gun with local vegetation against ground observation, then erect the flat top. The reason? When they are alerted for tanks they will generally have to remove the flat top because it will give them away to ground observation and will generally hamper their fighting the gun—so this comes off as late as possible, and then they are still concealed from ground observation. Intensive drill is required to obtain the necessary speed in removing the net.

#### 9. *Mutual Support*

Now to return to the duties of the Gun Commander. He must next check mutual support. This means that he must find out (if he doesn't know already) the positions of the other guns of the platoon, and if he is a flank gun he must know at least the nearest gun position of the neighboring platoon. He wants to know because he must ensure that his gun is covered by the fire of at least one other (this will have been arranged by the Platoon Commander and included in his orders, but the Gun Commander must check for himself—and the way to do it is not to sit and wait, but to go and find out for himself). He must check that his fire interlocks with the other guns, that there are no gaps.

#### 10. *Alternate Position and Range Card for It*

The Gun Commander then chooses an alternate position and makes out a range card for it. This means another position from which he can accomplish that same mission. He ensures that all his crew know not only where it is but also the route to it. This is SOP. He will only use it if his position becomes untenable, and this doesn't often happen, because you can sit in your pits and trenches for days and days under heavy shell fire and still be all right. But if you fight a tank and antitank action and still stay in your area after that, then you should move to an alternate position because generally one of the tanks will have radioed back your position.

#### 11. *Supplementary Positions*

Supplementary positions—i.e., for a different mission from a different direction—will of necessity be coordinated (if not chosen) by the Platoon Commander. That will be done in conjunction with the Company Commander, who will be working in with the Battalion Commander or the local infantry commander—probably both.

#### 12. *Security*

The Gun Commander finds out, if he doesn't know already, actually where the local security are on the ground, and points them out to his crew. (Note that the Company and Platoon Commanders must ensure that the area is covered by small arms fire, first to repel any infantry attacks and second to open up on tanks and make them close down.)

#### 13. *Administration, Including First Echelon Maintenance*

Administration must be attended to—gas, rations, ammunition, water, medical ("grawm").

The gun commander must ensure that his driver carries out his maintenance as regularly as possible. Generally the only time available for this in combat is the moment he gets to the motor park after the gun has gone into action. For SP the problem is even more difficult, but it must be done.

The Gun Commander should prepare a daily administration report covering all this in writing for his platoon commander and if the situation permits should take it in himself during the evening to Platoon H.Q.

#### 14. *Inform Platoon Commander That All This Has Been Done*

Finally, the Gun Commander should inform the Platoon Commander that all this has been done.

#### *Summary*

1. Mission. (Attention to *flank fire* and *defilade from the following tanks*.)  
"Size up" the position.
2. Emergency Action and post lookout.
3. Inform Platoon Commander "in emergency action."
4. Bore sight.
5. Inform crew of situation (this must be done early).
6. Send prime mover to motor park, first removing everything required.
7. "Progressive" digging and camouflage. Meanwhile make out range card and check ammunition (N.B.: Always test each round in the gun).  
Prepare lookout relief roster.
8. Position of other guns, *mutual support* (see that your gun is covered by at least one other); check *interlocking fire*.  
*This coordination starts with the Gun Commander.*
9. Alternate position, and gun card for it. (Note that supplementary positions will be reconnoitered by Platoon Commander on orders from his Company Commander.)
10. Gas; Rations; Ammunition; Water; Medic.
11. 1st echelon maintenance.
12. Inform Platoon Commander this has been done.

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#### TO A FALLEN ARTILLERYMAN BY D. S. S.

In a place beyond the maximum range where the overs all fall short,  
Where, soon or late, good gunners are ordered to report,  
One better day, artilleryman, we all shall sometime meet  
When the last mission's accomplished and the last round's complete.

Till then know this, artilleryman, as quietly you sleep,  
Your guidon we still hold aloft, the faith you kept we keep;  
And we shall on that far off day, together boot to boot,  
Ride past The Great Commander and give our proud salute.